

What is claimed is:

1. A system for facilitating distribution and accession of electronic files, comprising:

(a) a service facility having an electronically accessible catalog of the electronic files, and a network interface for communicating over a communications network;

(b) means for transmitting the catalog in response to a user request;

(c) means for defining a customer account for a user to identify the user as a customer, to process payments from the customer and establish authorization for accessing an authorized plurality of the electronic files;

(d) means for receiving from the network interface an order from the customer requesting selected ones of the electronic files;

(e) means for enabling transmission of the selected files by the network interface to the customer as received data files; and

(f) means for providing to the customer a player program for accessing the received data files, the player program being implemented for metering access to the received data files as limited by the authorization.

2. The system of claim 1, wherein the means for transmitting the selected files is enabled only while the authorization remains established.

3. The system of claim 1, wherein the means for transmitting the catalog is connected to the network interface for receipt of the user request therefrom and feeding the catalog thereto.

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4. The system of claim 1, wherein the means for defining the user account is operatively connected to the network interface for communications with the user.

5. The system of claim 4, wherein the means for defining the customer account comprises means for setting an authorization level of the authorization to a first value corresponding to a first authorized plurality of the electronic files, and to a second value corresponding to a second plurality of the electronic files.

6. The system of claim 5, further comprising means for augmenting the authorization in accordance with further processing of payments by the customer.

7. The system of claim 4, wherein the means for defining the customer account comprises means for identifying existing file access software to be used by the customer, and wherein the player program is in the form of a software patch to be used in conjunction with the existing file access software.

8. The system of claim 7, wherein the means for identifying the existing file access software comprises means for electronically interrogating a computer being used by the user to determine a default media player setting of that computer, and wherein the means for providing the player program comprises selecting the software patch from a stored plurality of player patches.

9. The system of claim 1, wherein the means for enabling the transmission comprises means for encrypting the electronic files and the player program comprises means for decrypting the received data files, the means for decrypting being operable only while the authorization remains established.

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10. The system of claim 1, wherein the authorization is independent of the selected ones of the data files within the authorized plurality of electronic files.

11. The system of claim 10, wherein the authorization is further independent of the number of the selected ones of the data files.

12. The system of claim 10, wherein the authorization is for a period of time.

13. The system of claim 12, wherein the period of time is calendar time.

14. The system of claim 13, wherein the period of time is measured only upon accessing data of the received data files by the player program.

15. The system of claim 12, wherein the period of time is measured only during accessing data of the received data files by the player program.

16. The system of claim 10, wherein the authorization is for a collective number of accesses of data of the received data files.

17. The system of claim 16, wherein the number of accesses are counted only after a threshold period of time of accessing each of the received data files.

18. The system of claim 1, further comprising means for renewing and/or extending the authorization in accordance with further processing of payments by the customer.

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19. The system of claim 1, further comprising means for storing at least some of the electronic files at the service facility.

20. The system of claim 1, further comprising means for facilitating transmission of at least some of the selected files to the customer from remote locations.

21. The system of claim 20, wherein the means for facilitating transmission comprises means for redirecting network communication with the customer from the service facility to a source facility over the communications network.

22. A method for facilitating distribution of electronic files to be accessed, comprising:

(a) providing a catalog of the electronic files for access by users of a communication network;

(b) defining a customer account for a user to identify the user as a customer, to process payments from the customer and to establish authorization for accessing an authorized plurality of the electronic files;

(c) enabling transmission of selected electronic files to the customer as received data files over the communication network in response to a customer order; and

(d) providing to the customer a player program for accessing and metering access to the received data files as limited by the authorization.

23. The method of claim 22, wherein the enabling is for the selected electronic files to be transmitted in encrypted form, the method further comprising providing with the player program means for decrypting the received data files only while the authorization remains established.

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24. The method of claim 22, wherein the authorization is independent of a number of the received data files within the authorized plurality of electronic files.

25. A process for accessing electronic files using the method of claim 22 wherein the authorization is for a predetermined period of time, the process further comprising:

- (a) activating the player program;
- (b) monitoring elapsed time; and
- (c) inhibiting operation of the player program when the elapsed time reaches the predetermined period.

26. The method of claim 25, wherein the monitoring is only during accessing of data of the received data files.

27. The method of claim 26, wherein the inhibiting is suppressed until the end of a currently accessed data file.

28. The method of claim 25, wherein the monitoring is of calendar time.

29. The method of claim 28, wherein the monitoring commences only upon accessing of data of the received data files.

30. The method of claim 28, wherein the inhibiting is suppressed until the end of a currently accessed data file.

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